

FONTANA



LUCIO FONTANA

1899-1968: A RETROSPECTIVE

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

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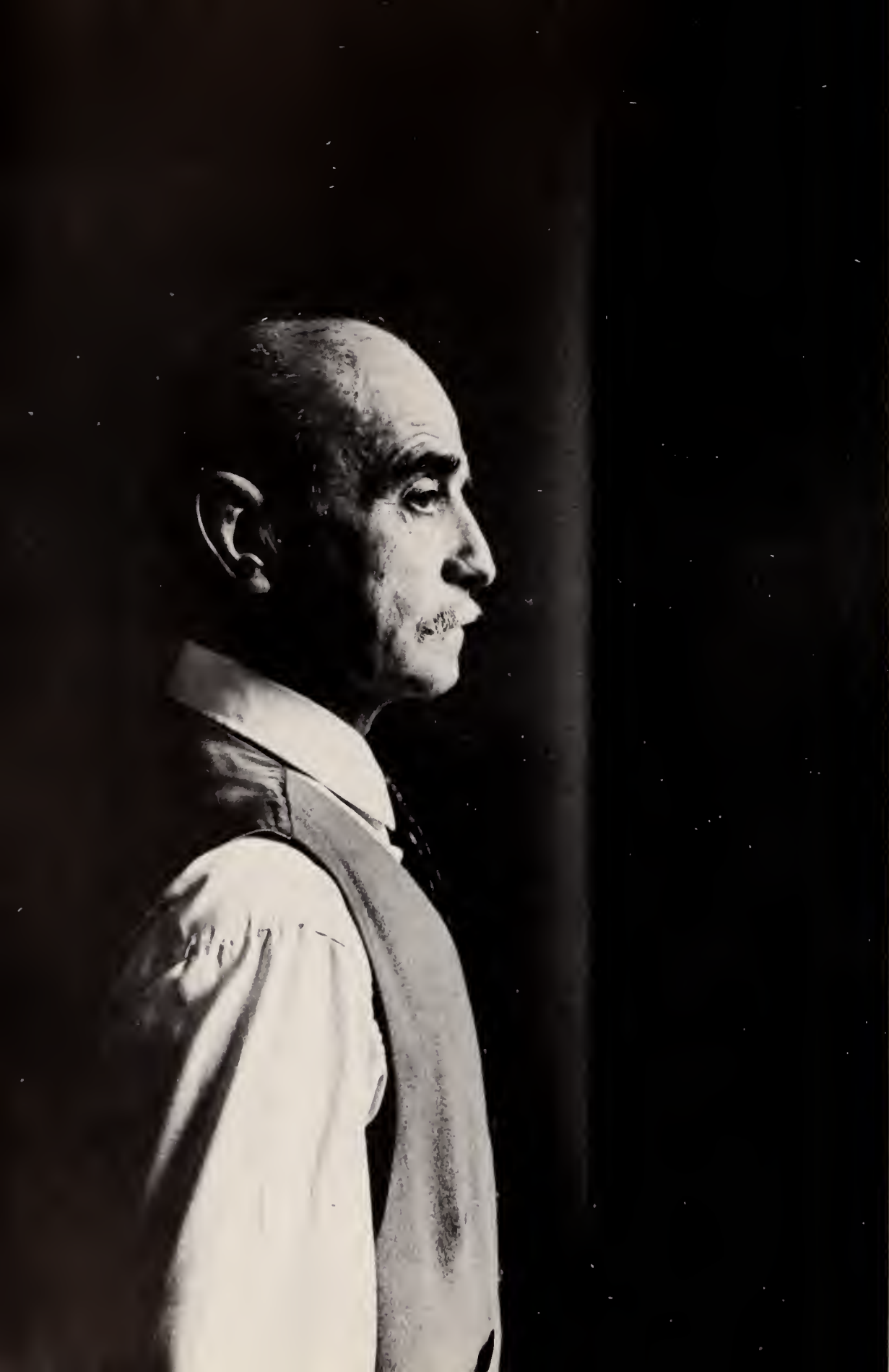
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lucio Fontana did not come to the attention of a broader American art public before the late 1950's when his daring canvas cuts marked him as a powerful innovator and a key figure on the European postwar scene. As often happens when a radical contribution is confronted and absorbed, curiosity about its origins and its place within the wider premise of innovative thought follows in its wake. To satisfy this interest and to isolate Fontana's development as draughtsman, sculptor, painter and proto-conceptual artist, the Guggenheim has undertaken this first museum retrospective in New York.

Models for such an exhibition existed in Europe, since Fontana's work had been honored by numerous retrospectives there since his death in 1968. The most recent of these was staged by Erika Billeter a year and a half ago at the Kunsthaus Zürich, where she is Associate Director and Curator of Modern Art. Dr. Billeter was therefore invited to be curator of the current presentation, and we owe our thanks to her for the selection of works as well as the conception of the exhibition's accompanying catalogue. In these tasks she was aided by others close to Fontana's work, and their successful accomplishment could only have been achieved with the extensive help—both documentary and logistical—provided by the Archivio Lucio Fontana in Milan. The Archivio's President, Signora Teresita Fontana, the artist's widow, and Valeria Ernesti, its Secretary, were personally involved in the conception and realization of this Fontana retrospective and gave us their generous, valuable and unstinting support. Signora Fontana also figured as principal lender to this exhibition. Many other European and American collectors, private as well as institutional, also parted with their precious possessions in order to further the understanding of Fontana's art. Their names are listed separately to underline our debt to each of them.

Collectors of Fontana's work are understandably concentrated in Italy, and Milan has become a veritable headquarters for the artist's many friends and admirers. But the exhibition selection also reflects wide-ranging concern with Fontana's work in other European countries and in the United States. To assure participation of American collectors, the Guggenheim through Linda Konheim, its

Curatorial Administrator, brought important works in this country to Dr. Billeter's attention. Miss Konheim also coordinated the complex arrangements involved in this undertaking and assisted with the exhibition's installation and the gathering of catalogue documentation. The publication itself was edited and its production overseen by Carol Fuerstein, the Museum's Editor. To all these and others who must remain unnamed, I extend the Guggenheim's deep appreciation.

The Fontana retrospective assembled here will, we trust, summarize the trenchant contribution of an outstanding postwar figure who has not so far received his due in this country. As Dr. Billeter's catalogue introduction indicates, Fontana's work may also stimulate reflection upon creative expression analogous to his own on both sides of the Atlantic.

THOMAS M. MESSER, *Director*
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

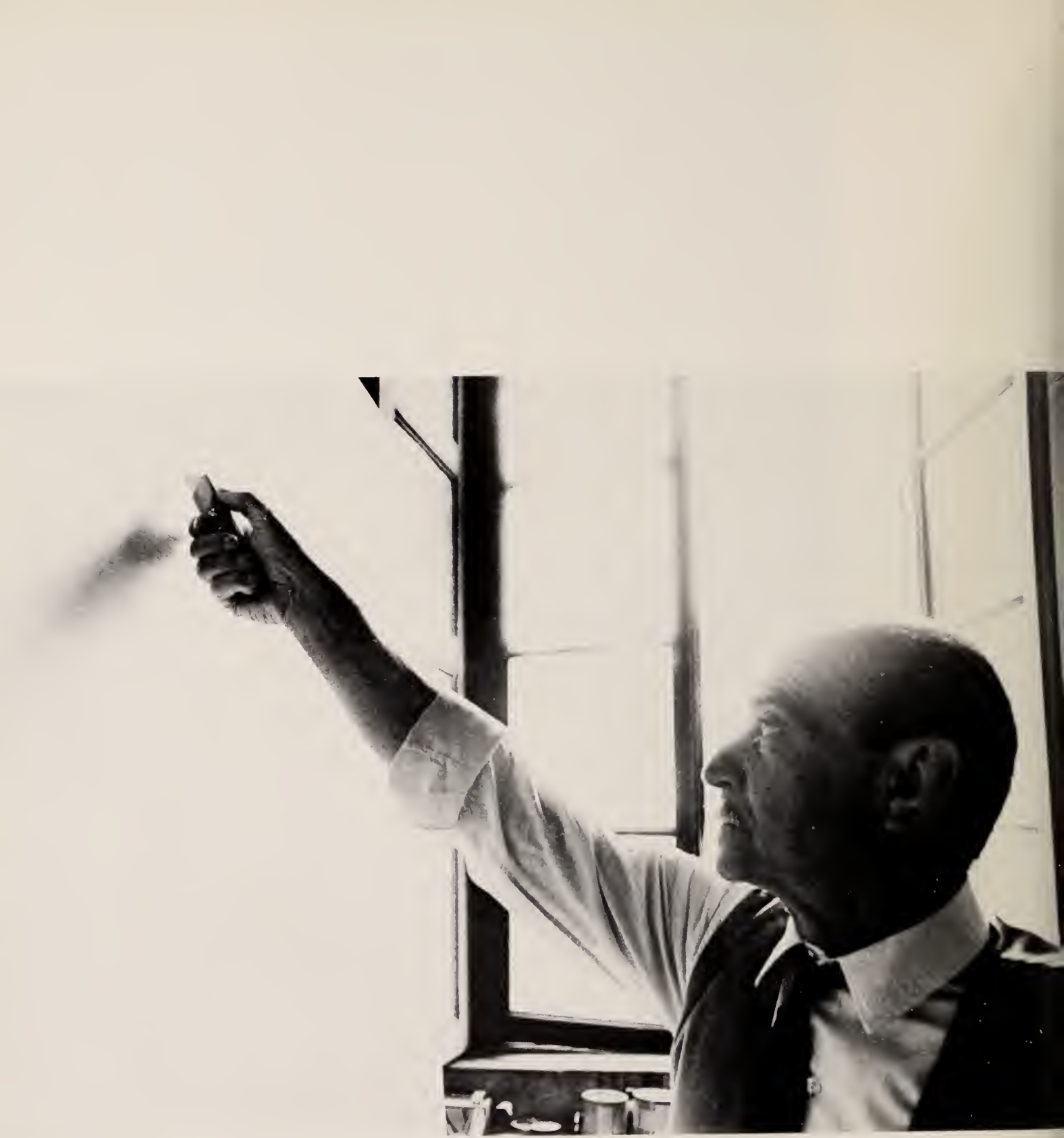
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LUCIO FONTANA

Between Tradition and Avant-Garde

Erika Billeter

Lucio Fontana in 1948 challenges the history of painting. With one bold stroke he pierces the canvas and tears it to shreds. Through this action he declares before the entire world that the canvas is no longer a pictorial vehicle and asserts that easel painting, a constant in art heretofore, is called into question. Implied in this gesture is both the termination of a five-hundred year evolution in Western painting and a new beginning, for destruction carries innovation in its wake. A new pictorial beauty grows with Fontana out of the act of destruction. The punctured painting becomes a work of art in its own right, and the pierced canvas affords possibilities for a new formulation of easel painting.

The *Buchi* (Holes)—those first examples of Fontana's new pictorial conception reveal themselves to us seven years after Fontana's death and nearly thirty years after their inception. They offer one among many gestural options. These canvases originated parallel to Pollock's early insight through which he perceived the canvas as a space within which to activate his gestural notations. Pollock dances into his paintings, brush in hand, but Fontana, too, performs a rhythmic dance as he perforates the canvas with a knife to create structures that lead the viewer to re-experience his motions. The painter's gestures thus become the medium of his communicative power. A few years thereafter the artist further sharpens his gesture in his so called "Cuts" (*Tagli*)—those vehement canvas slits that instantly come to mind when we think of Fontana. The artist recalls how in his rage over a spoiled work he cut the canvas to pieces. The new pictorial concept thus was born of the act of destruction. Subsequently he would prepare his cuts like a Chinese ink painter who executes his brushstroke in a single motion following profound meditation. The cut is as unrepeatable as the brushstroke and cannot be corrected. "People think that to cut or pierce is easy, but so much of this stuff is discarded" he explained to a friend, adding that "the idea must become clear beyond a doubt."

The cuts perpetuate the moment as East Asiatic ink painting does. Time freezes as we regard these works and as we seem to retain the cutting motion in our mind's eye. The perforation and the cutting of the canvas amounted to a revolutionary act when first performed. Today we see it in a context of gestural painting



Ugo Mulas



which we have assigned a place in art history. For Fontana himself these actions were never aesthetically subversive but rather an art "contemplatively arrived at," as he himself spoke of it. It was an art that pursued a goal. When, in 1948, Fontana for the first time ceased to view the canvas as a painted surface, when he broke through it to wrest from it its third dimension, he began to call his paintings *Concetti Spaziali* or Spatial Conceptions. This term indicated what Fontana meant to express through his novel pictorial form and what, ultimately, he attempted to realize through his knifed works. All his paintings since 1948 relate to his search for the third dimension—for a concrete rendering of space through appropriate imagery. After the *Manifesto Blanco*, published in Buenos Aires in 1946, all his manifestos accord a primary role to space as expression of an art with contemporary implications. Fontana wanted to exceed the illusionistic space that had dominated painting since the Renaissance, that moved overwhelmingly into the foreground during the Baroque period and that preoccupied the Futurists as a dynamic process.

No longer content to project space as illusion or *trompe l'oeil*, Fontana meant to introduce it into the picture as a fact. As he breaks into the canvas he no longer paints space but creates it. The painting in turn, instead of representing space, itself becomes space. Beyond this, the perforation and laceration of the picture surface and the resulting creation of a real space inseparable from its imagery, signified for Fontana, among other things, an art reflecting current scientific awareness, an homage to science. Fontana's interest in cosmic space developments was passionate. He did not live to see man's landing on the moon, which might well have convinced him that mankind could adapt in future to cosmic space—unless of course he would have come to share our present doubts on the subject. Be this as it may, it remains the objective of his *Concetti Spaziali* to transfer into art a fraction of this cosmic space as palpable reality.

From the outset of this striving, space was a central theme for Fontana. He was born in 1899 in Argentina. His sculptor father, Luigi Fontana, was Italian, his mother Argentinian. Lucio himself began his career as a sculptor who before his *Buchi* in 1949 had never painted a picture, although he had made pencil drawings at times. One of his most important early works the *Uomo Nero*, 1930, is a sculpture that still echoes Cubism. Through its hermetic fundamental conception as well as the compactness of its form, the work interacts ambiguously with space by declaring and preempting it at the same time. In the years that follow painted figurative pieces made of gesso and clay bear identical stylistic marks. In all of them, fleeting surface modelling dissolves Fontana's tectonic forms as their planes seem to recede into space.

The traces of an artisanal handling appear to be carved into the soft material. Two elements which we shall encounter again in the artist's mature work are already discernible in these early examples: gesture and space integration.

Alongside these figurative sculptures Fontana creates abstract works. This gave rise to interesting constellations in the oeuvre of the young artist who obviously wished to keep his options open, preferring not to commit himself to one or the other direction. But the tensions inherent in the dialogue so characteristic of his late work are already evident in his abstract enclosures, the rod-like structures and the graffiti tablets of this early phase. The surface is agitated in his abstract pieces as well. Both in his figurative and in his abstract sculptures one is aware of a proximity to the Baroque. Fontana is capable of reinterpreting such elements because of his deeply rooted empathy with this particular cultural tradition. The Baroque dimension in Fontana's creation reflects a concern with space which will come to preoccupy him passionately throughout his life. Drawings related to these abstract three-dimensional works are conceived in outline form: they are economical in their expression and rendered in quick strokes. In a sense, they foreshadow the *Concetti* of the 1950's, much as the sculptures themselves seem to anticipate Fontana's late paintings. And among other work of these early years that also predicts a later period, the terra-cottas for Mazzotti's garden in Albisola Mare are like stones embedded in nature. From these there leads a direct path to his *Nature*, to emerge in 1959-60.

In 1939, Fontana returned to Argentina after a lengthy stay in Italy. He first turned to sculpture but subsequently began automatic Surrealist-inspired drawing. It is at this stage that, for the first time, gesture unfolds as a decisive creative device, thus preparing Fontana for what he was to undertake a few years later: the image as living gesture. 1946 is the year of the *Manifesto Blanco*, which was written by Argentinian artist friends upon Fontana's urging. The ideas in this document were based upon Fontana's elaboration of the concept of dynamism in art, originally developed by Boccioni in behalf of Futurism. Fontana first realized his ideas about dynamism in his *Buchi*, which thus may be taken as an optical translation of the manifesto. Today we interpret this text as an expression of gestural art and identify it as a verbal translation of European abstract expressionism or *informel* painting, as it is usually called. At the time Fontana inspired the *Manifesto Blanco* he still did not paint, but devoted himself exclusively to sculpture and to drawing. Only in retrospect do we partake of that agitation and sense the new beginning which now informs his work. His ceramic sculpture already displays forcibly torn surfaces which, however, are still decorated with figurative elements. To manifest fully his ideas about space and dynamism Fontana felt compelled to move into abstraction.

The *Concetti Spaziali* in 1949 lead the artist to the realization of pure idea, freed from any attachment to the object. At the very moment he penetrates the canvas with his *Buchi* for the first time and as he integrates the space behind the painting in it, Fontana also creates his first environment. This *Ambiente Spaziale*, projected by means of ultraviolet light, first came into being at the Galleria del Naviglio in

Milan. It amounted to nothing less than his first integration of a work of art with space, a realization he had been seeking for decades. In the years that follow, Fontana continues to shape environments, introducing an art form that others only adopted and eventually exhausted in the 1960's.

A decisive change in Fontana's development had taken place with the *Concetti Spaziali*. Through them, the artist ceases to be a sculptor and becomes a painter. His dialogue with a plane, until now avoided, can no longer be delayed, but plane-ness is immediately ruptured in a search for three-dimensionality. What he previously achieved on the surfaces of his sculptures by gestural means is now expressed by the act of piercing the plane. Color no longer interests Fontana in these new experiments although earlier he had always colored his sculpture. What now concerns him deeply is gesture transformed into graphic structure. Initially he works upon white, that is, colorless planes. The ground is neutralized so that it remains no more than support for the gestural sign which thereby becomes charged in relation to the plane as a whole. It is impossible today to comprehend how radical this action was at the time. The perforation and laceration suggests that the canvas suffered, but implicit in the same act is a redeeming gesture toward an inherited, traditional pictorial form.

During the entire subsequent period, Fontana remains tied to the *Concetti Spaziali*. In a very real sense the *Concetti* constitute his mature phase which he reached through a consistent development, on the one hand, and by a radical break with tradition, on the other. Fontana always pursued his artistic themes over a period of years, putting them aside for a while only to take them up again. The *Buchi* made us think of cosmic movements in their often circular dynamics. They were succeeded by paintings called *Pietre* (Stones) in which negative perforation was opposed by positive accretion achieved by the setting of glass stones upon the pictorial surface. Figurative sculpture also returns once again in the 1950's, when Fontana participates in a competition for the execution of the portals for the Milan Cathedral. Here we encounter once more the sculptor of the 1930's and 40's. Baroque elements continue to prevail in movement, spatial relationships and the fragmentation of tectonic corporeality. It is hardly by chance that only a short time later, from 1954-57, Fontana creates a series of works clearly conceived in terms of their material and entitled *Barocchi*. Of these, four have titles that relate to literature although they remain entirely abstract. The titles, bestowed by Fontana himself, are *Crocifissione*, *Il Golgotha*, *L'Inferno* and *Il Paradiso*. They underline associations somewhat like those of the New York series and the ones related to the paintings inspired by Venice. Fontana never paints in a particular style at a particular time. While he lavishes color so freely in his *Barocchi* that they virtually become materializations, he is simultaneously capable of working tenderly in chalk and india ink.

1958 is the year of the first cuts, his *Tagli*. Fontana now slashes with a knife instead of puncturing holes in the canvas. *Concetti Spaziali—Attese*, Fontana's name for these works, may be translated as "expectations" or "hope." These monochromatic canvases with one or more incisions have become his trademark. Black gauze on the reverse of the canvas shimmers through the open cuts, acting as background while at the same time it evokes a darkly imaginary space. The title *Attese* refers to the mysterious world of darkness structured behind the incisions. For years, the cutting of the canvas was for Fontana an act of creative self-awareness. He was, nevertheless, preoccupied with other solutions even then. It is therefore impossible to think in terms of periods as one considers Fontana's development. There are, to be sure, brief thematic phases—experimental, transitional states—that may hold his interest for a year or more. His *Quanta* of 1959 are just such a development—irregularly shaped canvases, with one or two slits, that may be freely combined with one another. The series called *Fine di Dio* (God is Dead) emerges in 1963-64. It is a sequence of egg-shaped pictures of identical format painted in sweetish monochromes. Surfaces are torn open by myriad holes suggesting galaxies of stars or perhaps moonscapes, a world in any case in which God does not exist. The *Teatrini* (Small Theaters), perforated monochromatic canvas backdrops with superimposed lacquered wooden cutouts which appear in 1964, like the *Fine di Dio*, are closer to colored objects than to paintings. The *Teatrini* look like small stages upon which silhouettes of trees and bushes lead their magic existence. We shall refrain from an attempt to define them. Fontana himself always held that art could not be explained. He saw it as a manifestation of human intelligence.

While Fontana did not wish to explain art, he nevertheless expressed himself in many manifestos about ideas relating to new art forms. He sought verbal explanations wherever visual means were inadequate. The theories he postulated were meant for the future and transformed into creative acts only by subsequent generations. "All depends upon ideas, upon the cut and the gesture" he said in 1966. When he proposed to show a single painting in one room, it was Fontana's objective to completely realize an idea through his gesture.

As early as 1948 he wrote "art is eternal but not immortal." And "art dies but is saved by gesture." He was aware that art was the hostage of matter and that *sub species eternitatis* a millenium is but a moment. As a result he cared little whether a work of art lived only for a moment or lasted two thousand years. Such concepts, first expressed by the Dadaists, were new again and radical by 1948. They already anticipated the art form of the Happening which did not appear for another decade.

By 1947 Fontana spoke of *Concetti* or concepts, long before the notion of an art of ideas or conceptual art gained currency. At a very early date Fontana also took into consideration the creative opportunities presented by television. In

1952, when he read his *Manifesto del movimento spaziale per la televisione*, he stated that “television is one of the long awaited means that will enable us to integrate our conceptions.” In 1948 he ventured that “Art no longer develops through the use of stones and colors. A new art must make use of light and television—techniques that can be transformed into art only by creative artists.” The new medium was then only in its infancy and the term “video,” which today is commonplace in artist’s circles, had not even been coined. Fontana, because he was himself possessed of a far-ranging imagination, was acclaimed by a generation of young artists as a seminal initiator of new creative concepts. This also explains the relevance his work still retains. That he is, at the same time, considered a modern classic is not inconsistent with such relevance, since in our era of short-lived generations, artistic ideas succeed one another rapidly.

Fontana’s oeuvre shines out in other respects as well. It is still wholly informed by the serenity of a painterly vision in spite of all its revolutionary notions. Fontana is one of the first artists since Malevich to pay homage to monochrome painting. All of his first perforated paintings around 1949 are white, and it still seems appropriate to note in passing how much an artist like Yves Klein owes to this new awareness of monochrome which Fontana reintroduced into painting. In the 1950’s it was hardly possible to imagine a more rigorous asceticism than the reduction of pictorial means expressed by Fontana when he made an incision on a monochromatic plane. Implicit in this asceticism is a new grasp of painterly subtleties. As we know from his photographic portraits, Fontana was a man of rare noblesse, a noblesse which also characterized his paintings. This quality, all too rare in our time, is supported by the detached objectivity of a sovereign spirit.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Numbers and letters following title refer to those given in Enrico Crispolti and Jan van der Marck, *Lucio Fontana*, 2 vols., Brussels, La Connaissance, 1974.

SCULPTURE (SCULTURE)



- 1 *Nude (Nudo)*
26 SC 1. 1926
Plaster, $6\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ " (17.5 x 21 x 14 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

- 2 *Figure at the Window (Figura alla Finestra)*
31 SC 4. 1931
Polychrome terra-cotta, $15\frac{3}{8} \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$ "
(39 x 19 x 20 cm.)
Collection Pollini, Milan

- 3 *Black Figures (Figure Nere)*
31 SC 7. 1931
Polychrome terra-cotta, $16\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{3}{4} \times 5$ "
(41 x 30 x 12.5 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



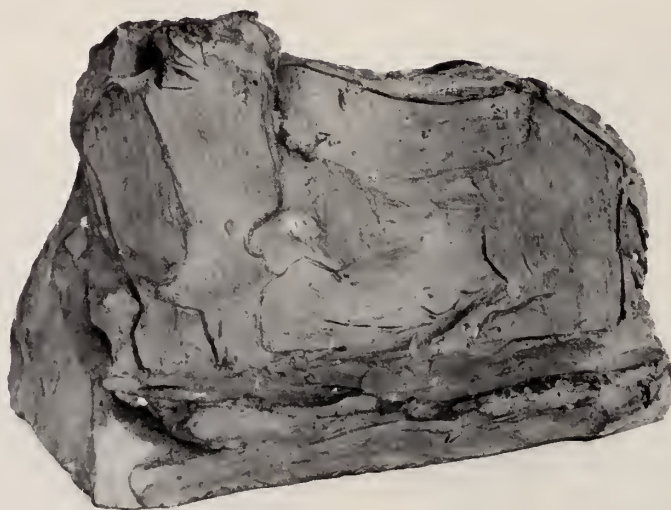
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3

- 4 *Bull (Toro)*
31 SC 8. 1931
Terra-cotta, $5\frac{7}{8} \times 7\frac{7}{8} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ " (15 x 20 x 9.5 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

- 5 *The Pilots' Lovers (Le Amanti dei Piloti)*
31 SC 9. 1931
Polychrome terra-cotta, $10\frac{1}{4} \times 15\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ "
(26 x 40 x 14 cm.)
Lent by Galleria del Naviglio, Milan



4



5

- 6 *Head of a Girl (Testa di Ragazza)*
31 SC 12. 1931
Polychrome terra-cotta, 15 x 12½ x 7⅞"
(38 x 32 x 20 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

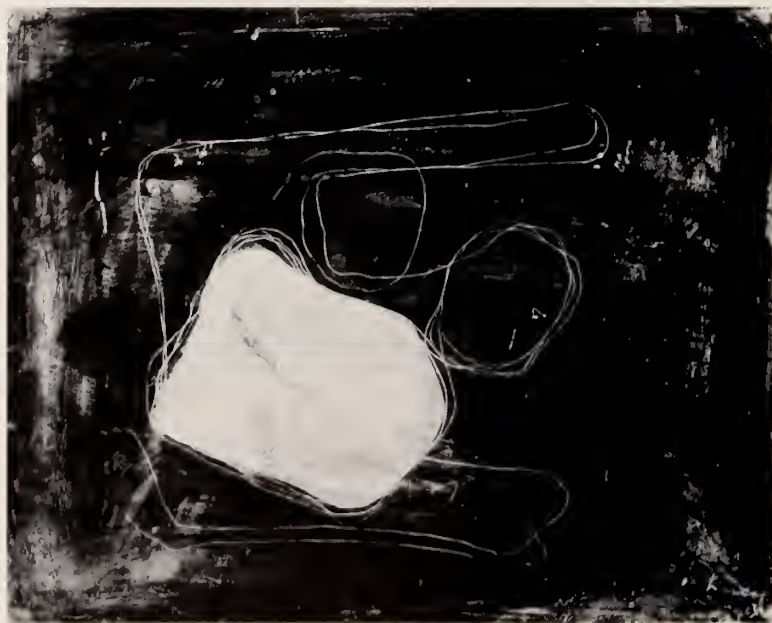


- 7 *Tablet with Graffiti (Tavoletta Grafita)*
 31 SC 15. 1931
 Polychrome plaster, 9 x 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (23 x 29 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



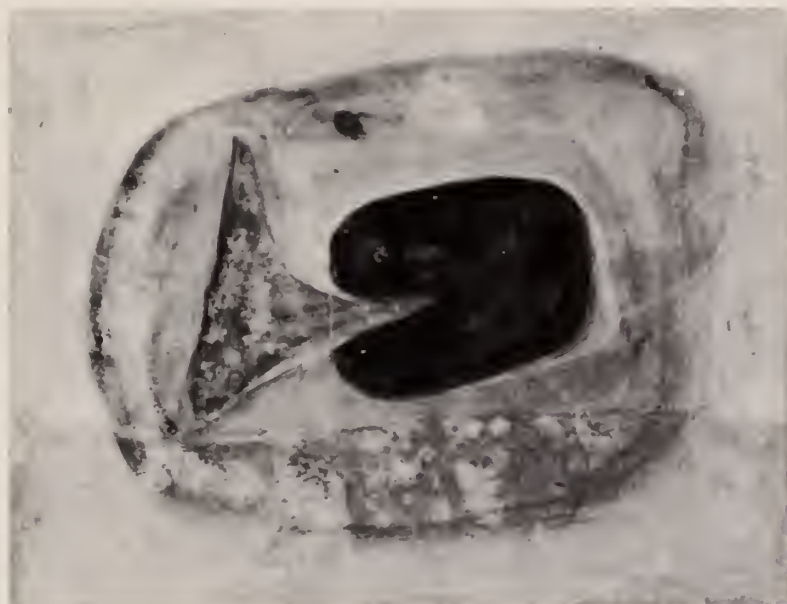
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- 8 *Tablet with Graffiti (Tavoletta Grafita)*
 31 SC 16. 1931
 Polychrome cement, 9 x 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (23 x 29 cm.)
 Private Collection



8

- 9 *Tablet with Graffiti (Tavoletta Grafiti)*
31 SC 18. 1931
Polychrome cement, 9 x 11½" (23 x 28 cm.)
Private Collection, Vicenza, Italy



9

- 10 *Tablet with Graffiti (Tavoletta Grafiti)*
32 SC 3. 1932
Polychrome cement, 9½ x 11" (24 x 28 cm.)
Collection Carla Panicali, Rome



10

II *The Guests (Le Ospiti)*

33 SC 3. 1933

Polychrome plaster, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 33 x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (60 x 84 x 40 cm.)

Lent by Studio B.B.P.R., Milan



II

12 *Seated Woman (Signorina Seduta)*
34 SC I. 1934
Polychrome bronze, $32\frac{1}{2} \times 33\frac{1}{2} \times 27\frac{1}{2}$ "
(82 x 85 x 70 cm.)
Collection Civica Galleria d'Arte, Milan



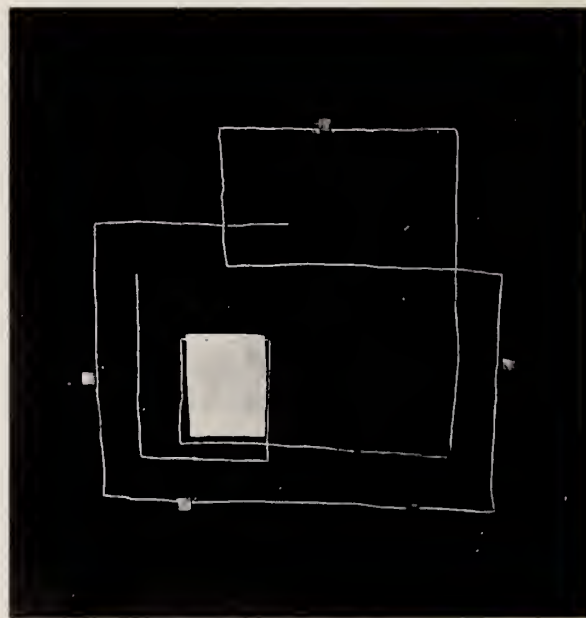
12

- 13 *Abstract Sculpture (Sculptura Astratta)*
34 SC 6. 1934
Polychrome cement, $15\frac{3}{4} \times 11''$ (40 x 28 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



13

- 14 *Abstract Sculpture (Sculptura Astratta)*
34 SC 8. 1934
Polychrome cement, $11\frac{3}{8} \times 12\frac{3}{8}''$ (29 x 31.5 cm.)
Lent by Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan



14

15 *Conversation (Conversazione)*
34 SC II. 1934
Gilded bronze, 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " h. (68 cm.)
Private Collection, Milan



- 16 *Abstract Sculpture (Sculptura Astratta)*
 34 SC 13. 1934
 Painted bronze, $25\frac{1}{4} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ " (64 x 45 cm.)
 Collection Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin

- 17 *Abstract Sculpture (Sculptura Astratta)*
 34 SC 17. 1934
 Polychrome cement and iron, $23\frac{1}{4} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ " (59 x 50 cm.)
 Collection Carla Panicali, Rome



16



17

- 18 *Relief (Rilievo)*
 34 SC 22. 1934
 Polychrome cement, $10\frac{3}{8} \times 11"$ (27 x 28 cm.)
 Collection Luigi Veronesi, Milan

- 19 *Abstract Sculpture (Scultura Astratta)*
 34 SC 26. 1934
 Polychrome cement, $11 \times 7\frac{1}{8}"$ (28 x 18 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



18



19



20

- 20 *Abstract Sculpture (Scultura Astratta)*
 34 SC 29. 1934
 Iron, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ " h. (35 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

- 21 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 57 SC 3. 1957
 Iron, 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ " h. (130 cm.)
 Private Collection, Turin



21

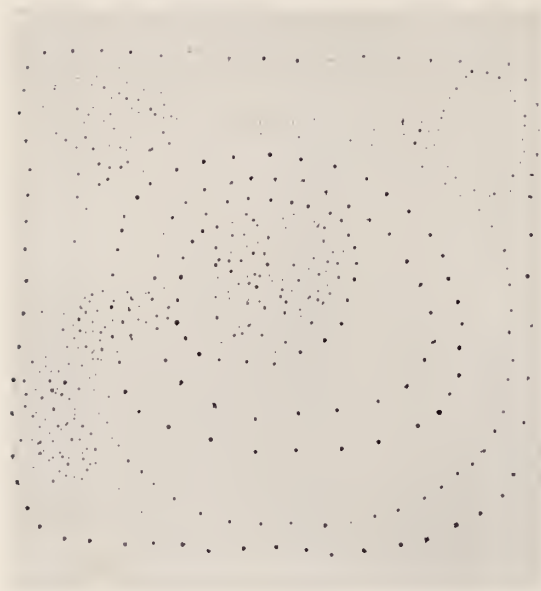
- 22 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
58 SC 1. 1958
Iron, 95 $\frac{3}{4}$ " h. (243 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



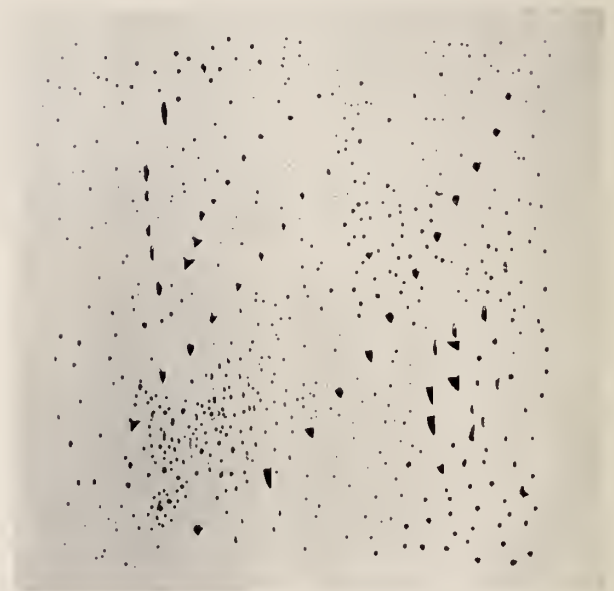
HOLES (BUCHI)

- 23 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
49 B 3. 1949
Oil on paper mounted on canvas, $39\frac{3}{8} \times 39\frac{3}{8}$ "
(100 x 100 cm.)
Collection Carla Panicali, Rome

- 24 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
49/50 B 10. 1949-50
Oil on canvas, $43\frac{1}{4} \times 42\frac{7}{8}$ " (110 x 109 cm.)
Collection Kunsthaus Zürich



23



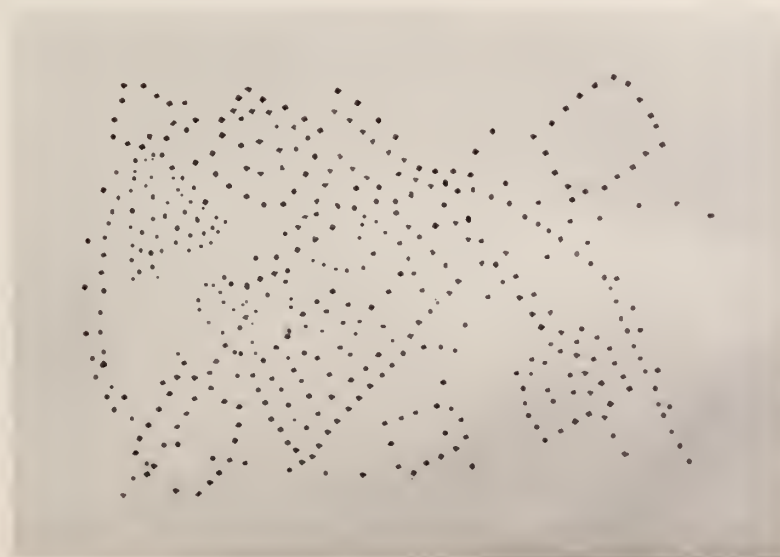
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- 25 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
50 B 6. 1950
Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (81 x 64 cm.)
Collection Milena Milani, Savona

- 26 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
51 B 3. 1951
Oil on canvas, 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (69.5 x 99.5 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



25



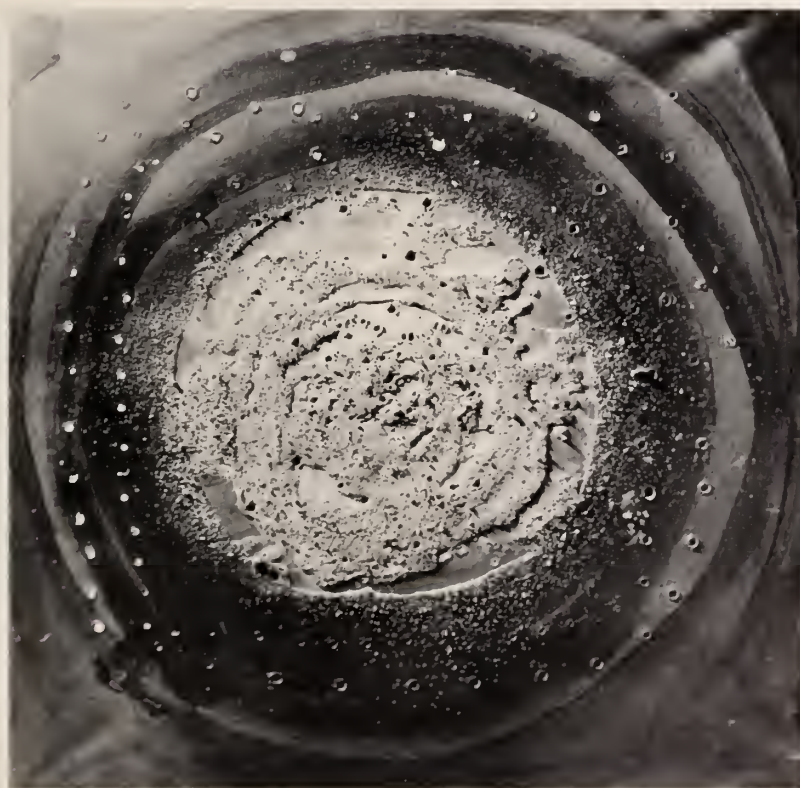
26

- 27 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
51 B 7. 1951
Oil on canvas, $33\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{5}{8}$ " (85 x 65 cm.)
Collection Hannelore B. Schulhof



27

- 28 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
51 B 17. 1951
Oil with sand on canvas, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (60 x 59 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

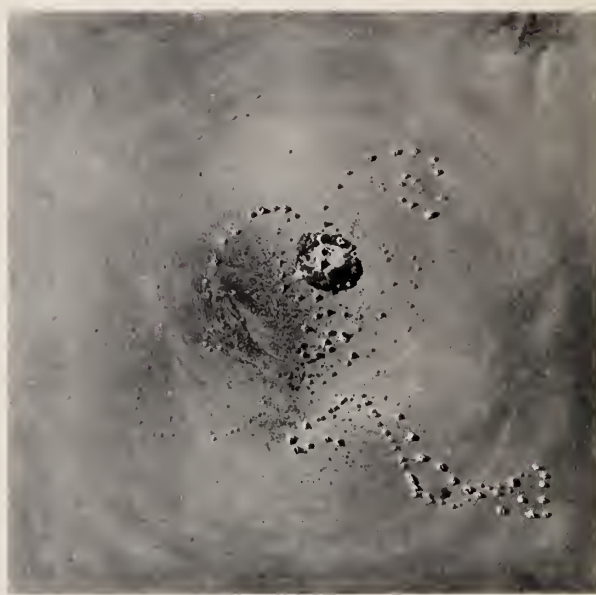


- 29 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
51/52 B 7. 1951-52
Oil with spangles on paper mounted on canvas,
30 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (78 x 78 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



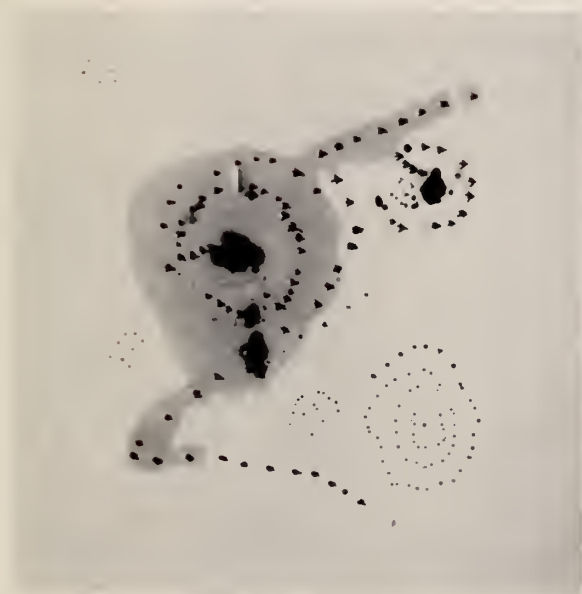
29

- 30 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
51/52 B 8. 1951-52
Oil with spangles on paper mounted on canvas,
30 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (77 x 77 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



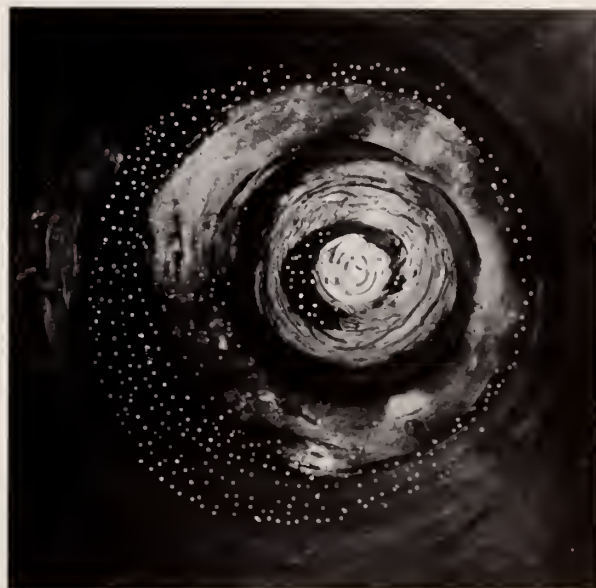
30

- 31 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 51/52 B 9. 1951-52
 Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 31½ x 31½"
 (79 x 79 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



31

- 32 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 52 B 3. 1952
 Oil with spangles on cardboard, 31½ x 31½"
 (80 x 80 cm.)
 Lent by Studio Santandrea, Milan



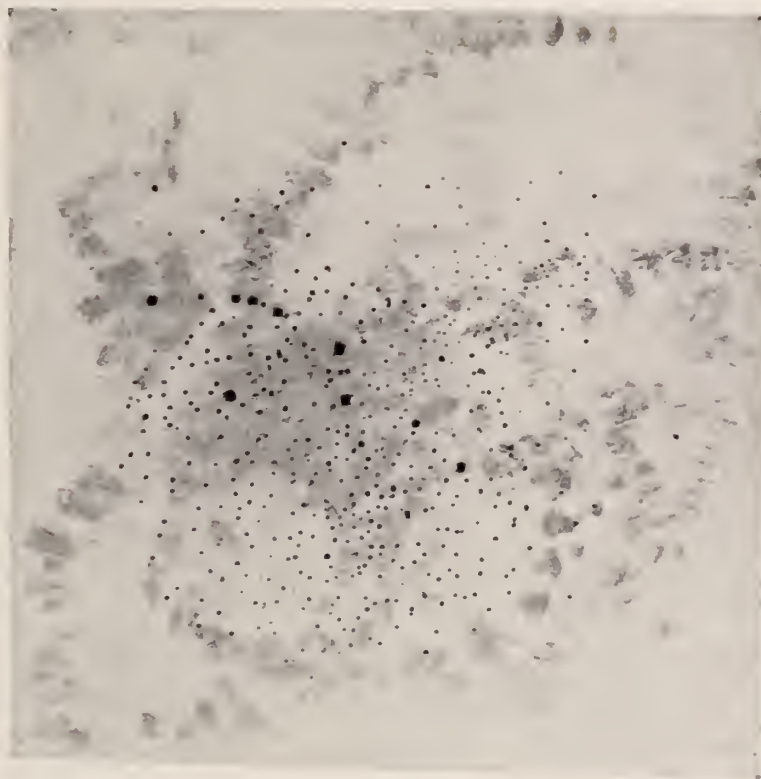
32

- 33 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
52 B 9. 1952
Oil with spangles on paper mounted on canvas,
31½ x 31½" (80 x 80 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



33

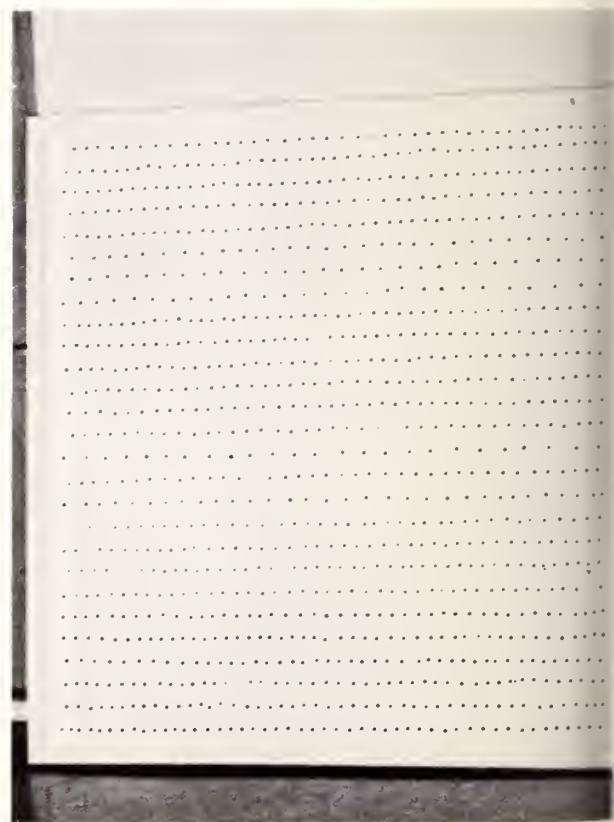
- 34 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
52 B 17. 1952
Oil on canvas, 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (50 x 50 cm.)
Collection Enrico Lucci, Biella

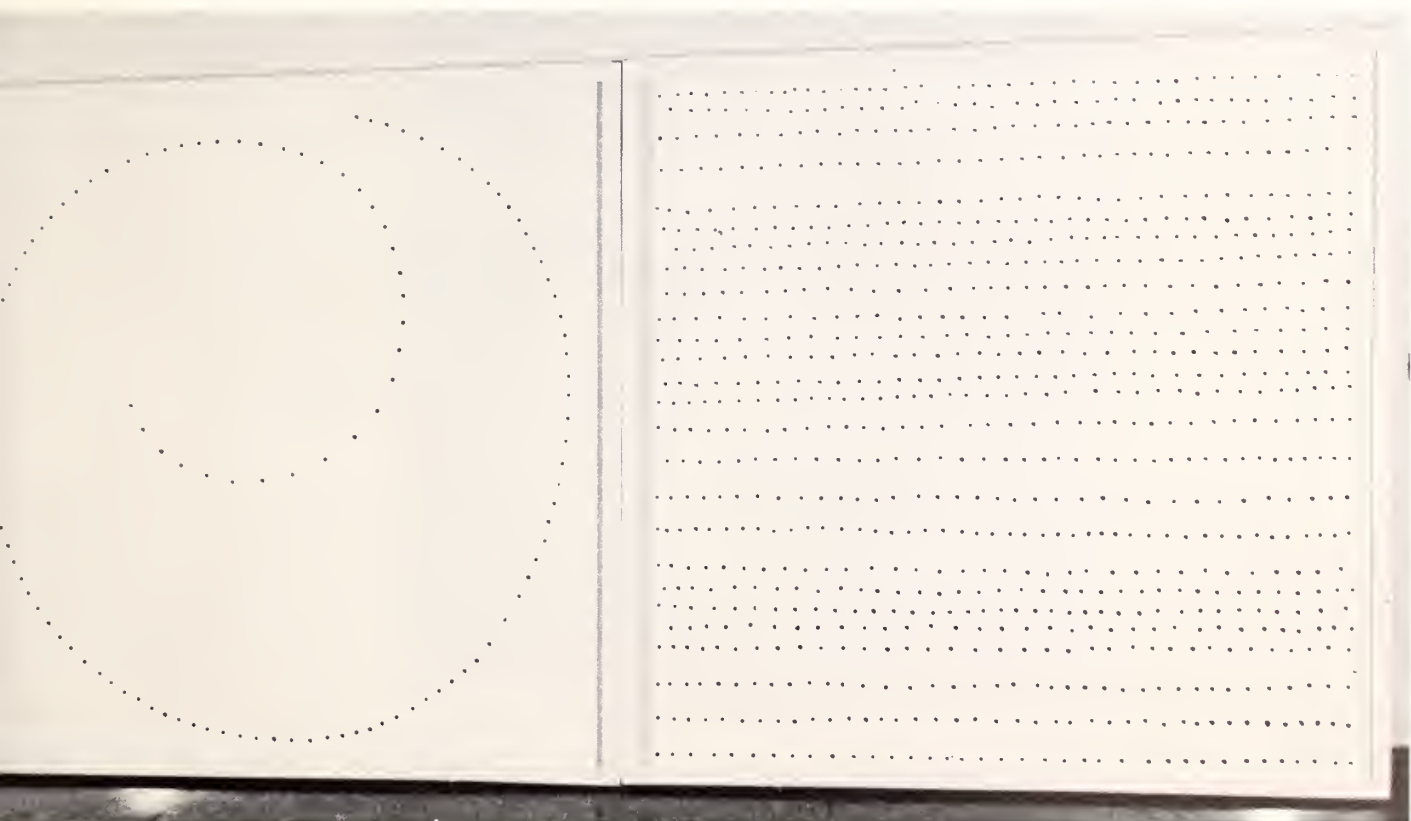


- 35 *Spatial Conception, Trinity (Concetto Spaziale, La Trinità)*
66 B 8, 9, 10. 1966

Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood
frame, three panels, each $80\frac{1}{4} \times 80\frac{1}{4}$ " (203 x 203 cm.)

Lent by Marlborough Galleria d'Arte, Rome





STONES (PIETRE)

- 36 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
54 P 9. 1954
Oil with glass on canvas, 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (59 x 69.5 cm.)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Berlingieri, Rome



36

- 37 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
55 P 20. 1955
Oil with glass on canvas, 49¼ x 33¼" (125 x 85 cm.)
Collection Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The
Netherlands



- 38 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
55 P 28. 1955
Oil, sand and glass on wood, 69¼ x 49⅝"
(176 x 126 cm.)
Collection Serge De Bloet, Brussels



38

- 39 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 55 P 29. 1955
 Oil with glass on canvas, $55\frac{1}{8} \times 31\frac{1}{2}$ " (140 x 80 cm.)
 Private Collection, Milan



- 40 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 55 P 37. 1955
 Oil with glass on canvas, $31\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{5}{8}$ " (80 x 65 cm.)
 Lent by Galleria Seno, Milan



40

BAROQUE (BAROCCHI)

- 41 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
56 BA 2. 1956
Oil with spangles on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 53 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
(100 x 136 cm.)
Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna,
Collection Boschi, Milan



41

- 42 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
56 BA 6. 1956
Oil with spangles on canvas, 38 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (98 x 78 cm.)
Private Collection, Europe



42

- 43 *Spatial Conception, Crucifixion (Concetto Spaziale, Crocifissione)*
56 BA 9. 1956
Oil with glass on wood, 49½ x 68⅞" (125 x 175 cm.)
Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna,
Collection Boschi, Milan



43

- 44 *Spatial Conception, Golgotha (Concetto Spaziale,
Il Golgotha)*
56 BA 10. 1956
Oil with glass on wood, 68 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 49 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (175 x 125 cm.)
Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna,
Collection Boschi, Milan

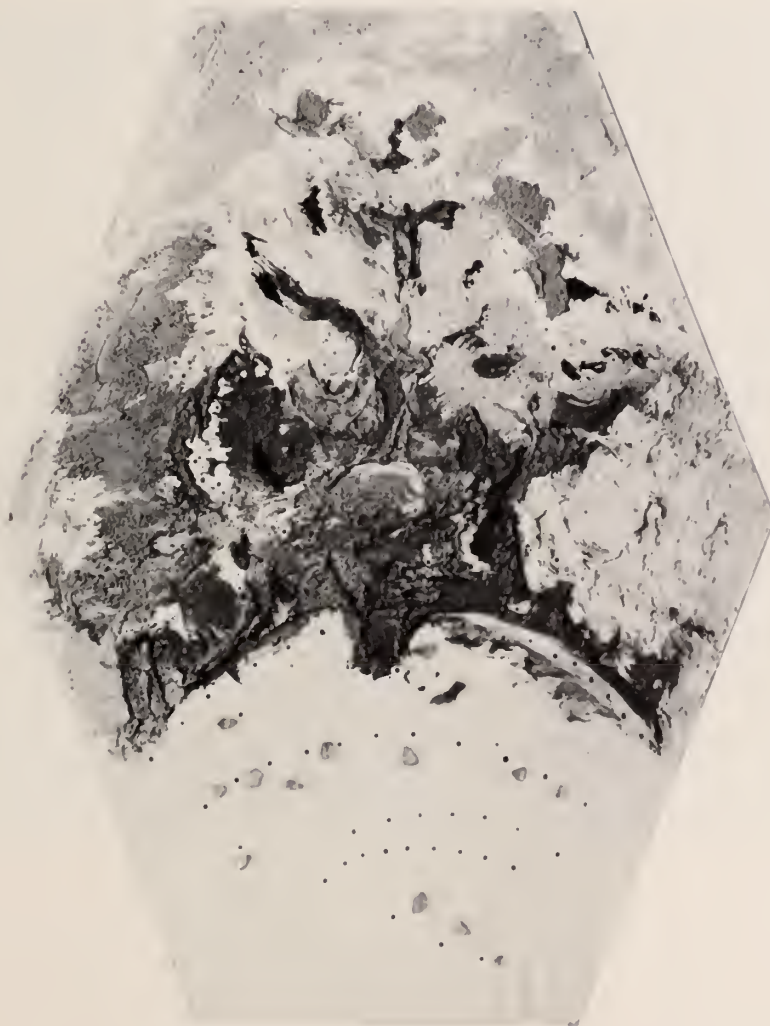


- 45 *Spatial Conception, Inferno (Concetto Spaziale,
L'Inferno)*
56 BA 13. 1956
Oil with glass on canvas, $47\frac{5}{8} \times 36\frac{5}{8}$ " (121 x 93 cm.)
Private Collection



45

- 46 *Spatial Conception, Paradise (Concetto Spaziale,
Il Paradiso)*
56 BA 14. 1956
Oil with glass on canvas, 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 35 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (120 x 91 cm.)
Collection Laurini



- 47 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
57 BA 35. 1957
Oil with spangles on canvas, 49¼ x 35½" (125 x 90 cm.)
Private Collection



47

- 48 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
57 BA 47. 1957
Oil with spangles on canvas, $45\frac{5}{8} \times 35\frac{1}{2}$ "
(116 x 90 cm.)
Collection Hannelore B. Schulhof



48

- 49 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
1957
Oil, sand, glass and spangles on canvas, $45\frac{5}{8} \times 35$ "
(116 x 89 cm.)
Lent by Galleria Nuovo Sagittario, Milan



49

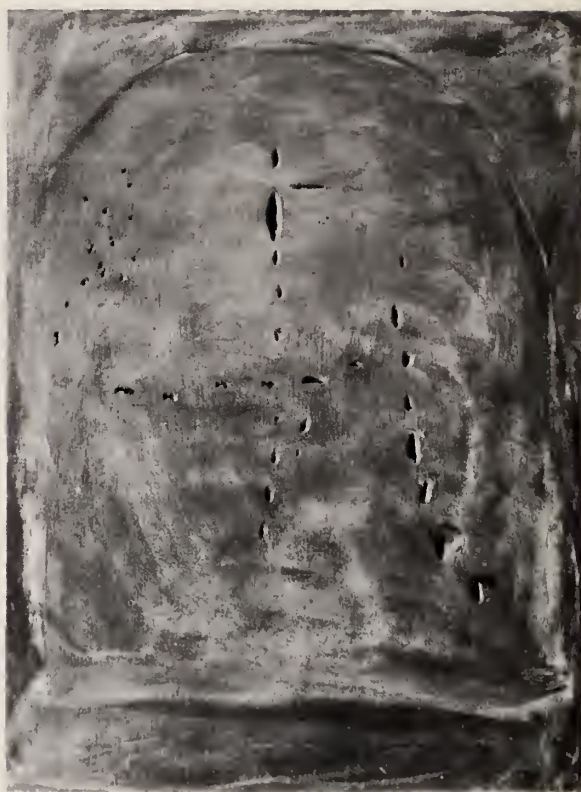
CHALKS (GESSI)

- 50 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 54 G 3. 1954
 Pastel on canvas, $39\frac{3}{8} \times 27\frac{1}{8}$ " (100 x 69 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



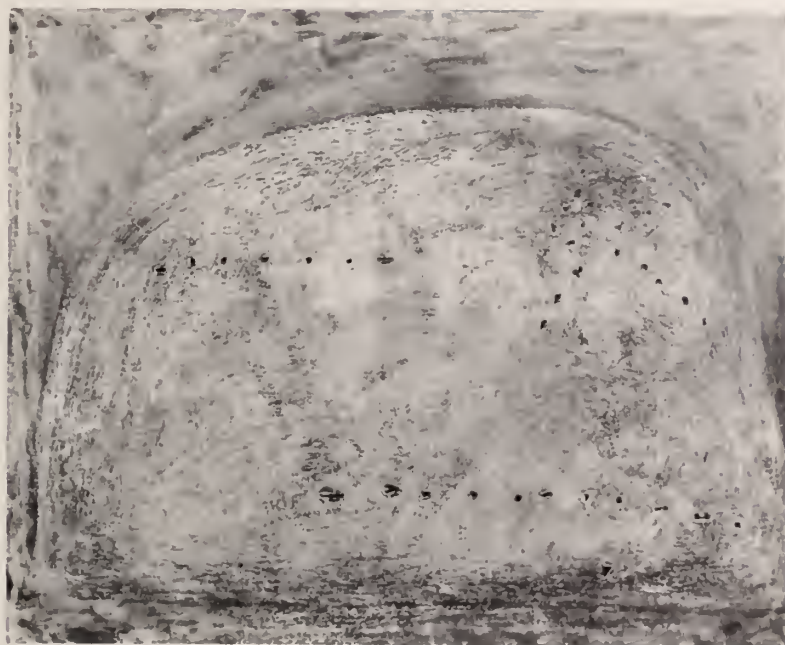
50

- 51 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 54 G 6. 1954
 Pastel on canvas, $31\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{3}{8}$ " (80 x 60 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



51

- 52 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
56 G 4. 1956
Pastel on canvas, 25 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 31 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (65 x 81 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



52

- 53 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*.
1956
Pastel on canvas, $39\frac{3}{8} \times 31\frac{7}{8}$ " (100 x 81 cm.)
Lent by Galleria del Naviglio, Milan



53

- 54 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
57 G 6. 1957
Pastel on canvas, $31\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{3}{8}$ " (80.5 x 60 cm.)
Collection Mario Bardini, Varigotti



54



55



56

55 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 57 G 19. 1957
 Pastel with collage on canvas, $41\frac{3}{8} \times 49\frac{1}{4}$ "
 (105 x 125 cm.)
 Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna,
 Collection Boschi, Milan

57 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 58 G 7. 1958
 Aniline and pencil on canvas, $38\frac{3}{8} \times 51\frac{1}{8}$ " (98 x 130 cm.)
 Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

56 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 57 G 23. 1957
 Pastel with collage on canvas, $44\frac{7}{8} \times 65$ " (114 x 165 cm.)
 Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna,
 Collection Boschi, Milan



57

INKS (INCHIOSTRI)

58 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*

57 I 4. 1957

Aniline and collage on canvas, 58 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 59" (149 x 150 cm.)

Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



58

- 59 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
57 I 5. 1957
Aniline and collage on canvas, 59 x 59" (150 x 150 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

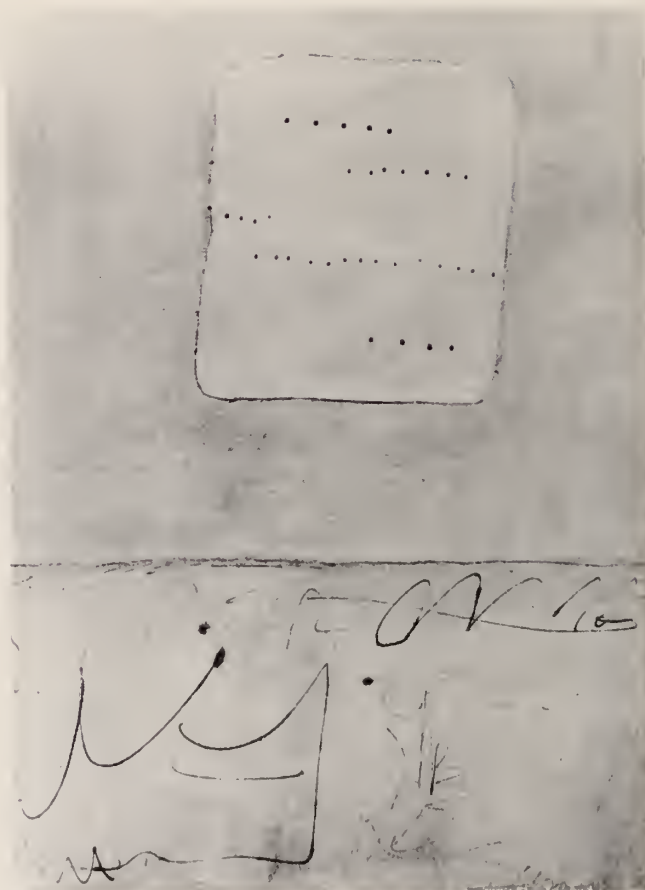


60 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*

58 I 7. 1958

Aniline with ink and collage on canvas, $53\frac{1}{8} \times 38\frac{5}{8}$ "
(135 x 98 cm).

Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan

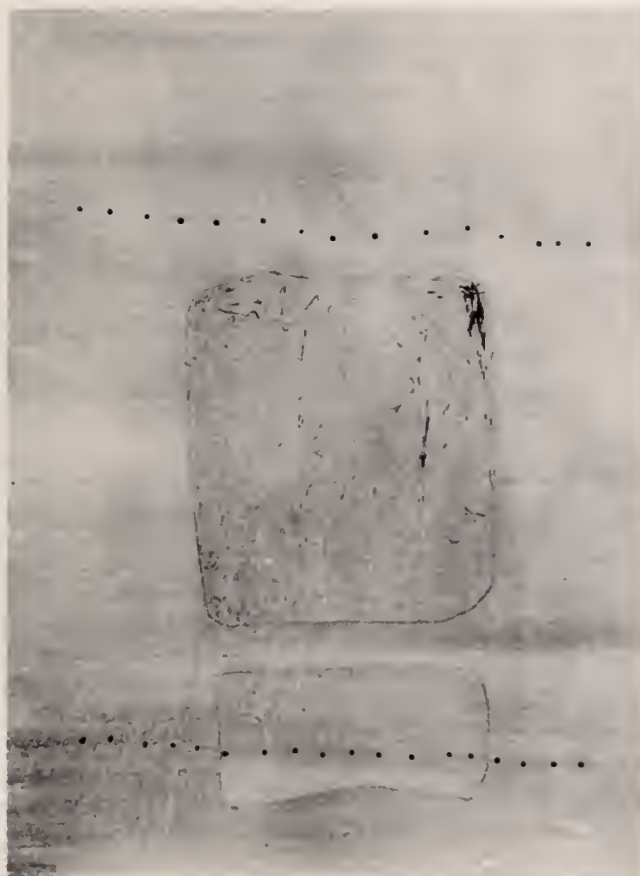


60

61 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
58 I 8. 1958

Aniline with ink and collage on canvas, 65 x 50"
(165 x 127 cm.)

Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



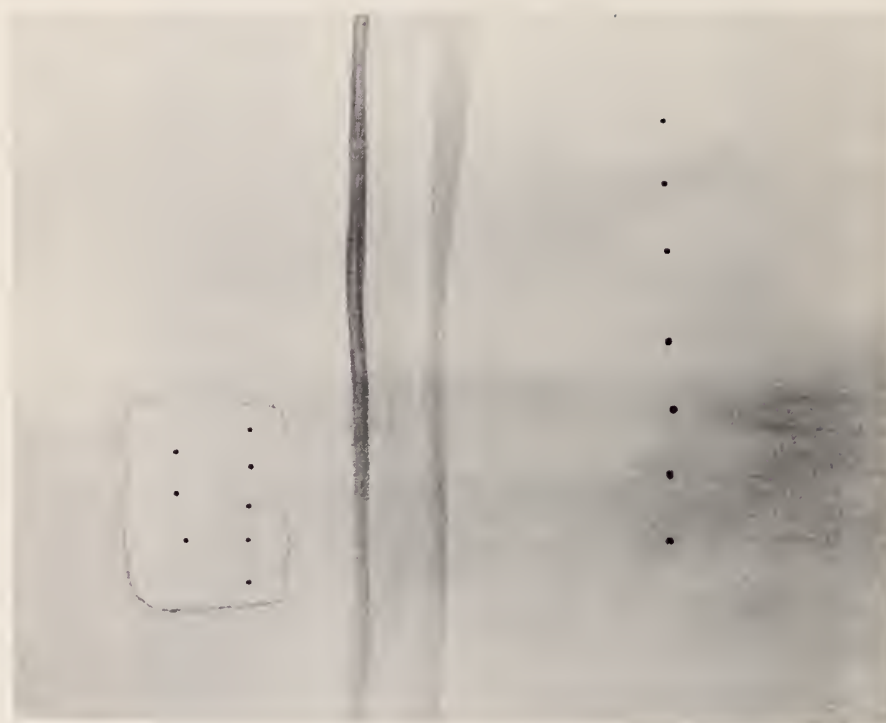
61

62 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*

58 I 44. 1958

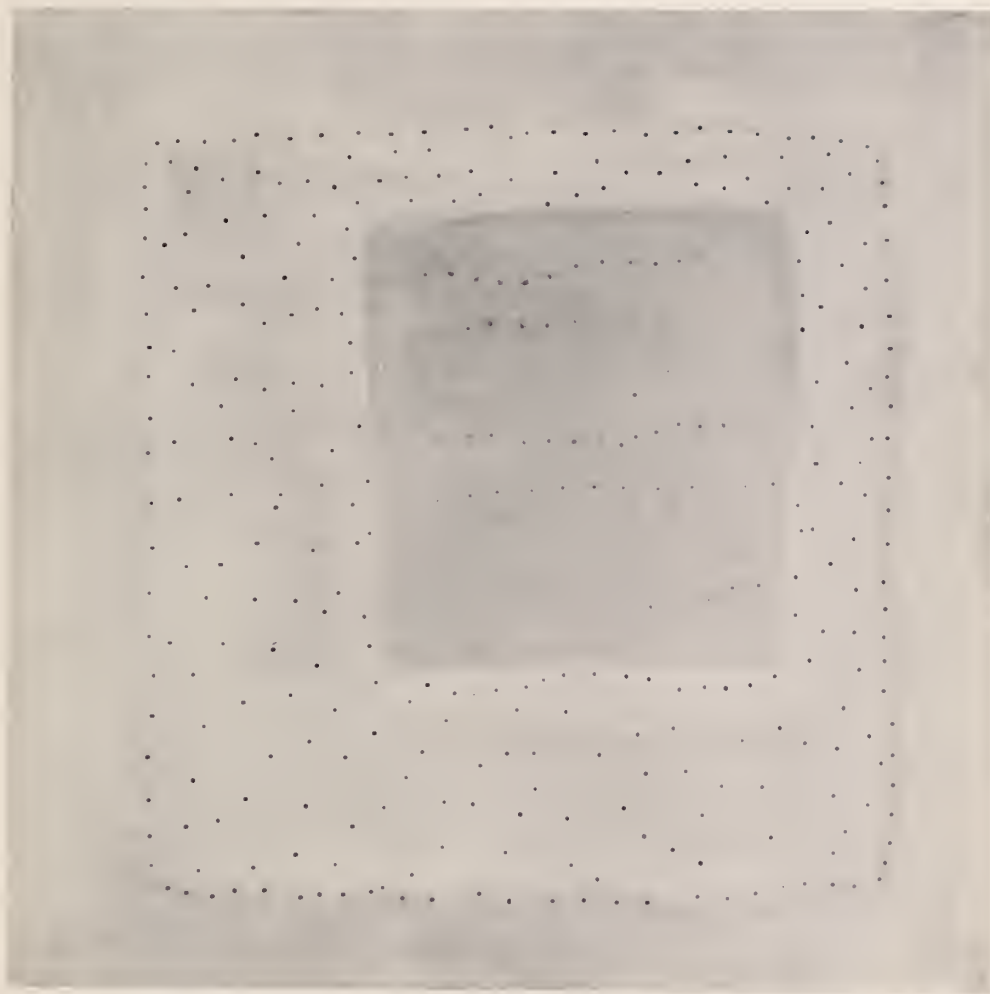
Aniline with pencil and collage on canvas, $31\frac{1}{2} \times 39\frac{3}{8}$ "
(80 x 100 cm.)

Collection Raimondo Bariatti, Milan



62

- 63 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*.
1958
Aniline and collage on canvas, 59 x 59" (150 x 150 cm.)
Collection Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark

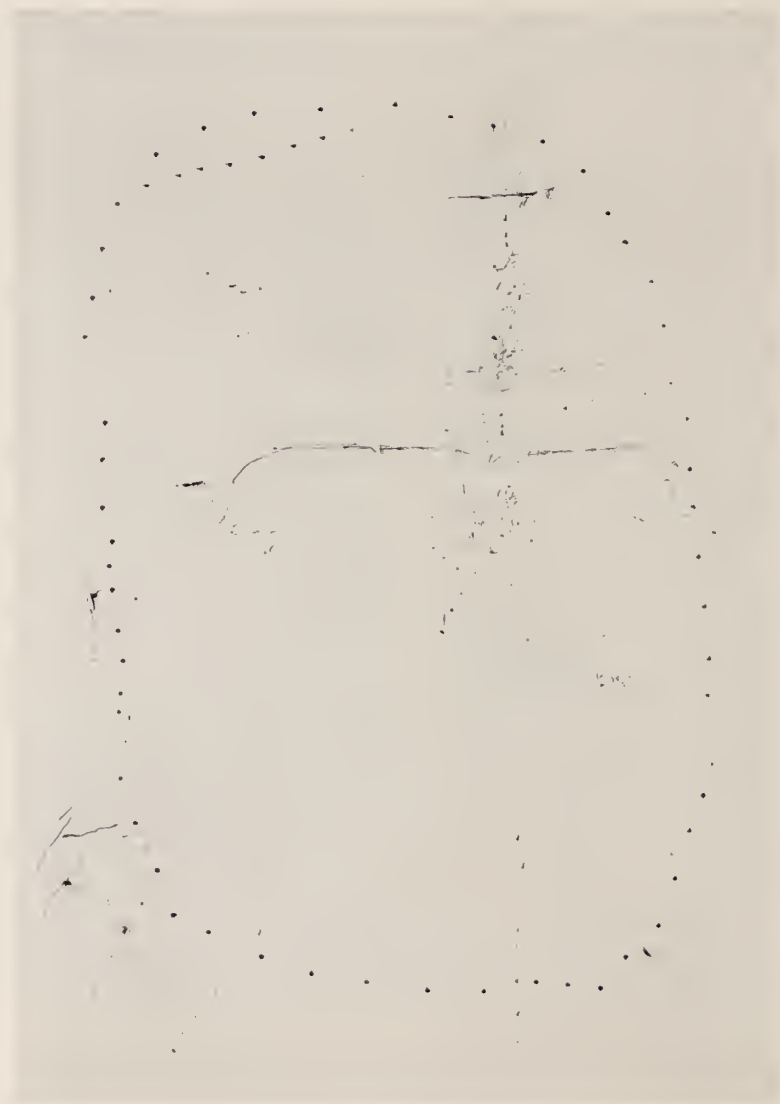


PAPERS (CARTE)

64 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
1957?

Aniline, ink and pencil on paper mounted on canvas,
78 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 55" (200.4 x 139.7 cm.)

Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Gift of Morton G. Neumann, 1976



65 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*

58 CA 11. 1958

Aniline on paper mounted on canvas, $39\frac{7}{8} \times 39\frac{7}{8}$ "
(100 x 100 cm.)

Collection Fornaciari-Roma



- 66 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
58/59 CA 2. 1958-59
Aniline on paper mounted on canvas, $31\frac{7}{8} \times 39\frac{3}{8}$ "
(81 x 100 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



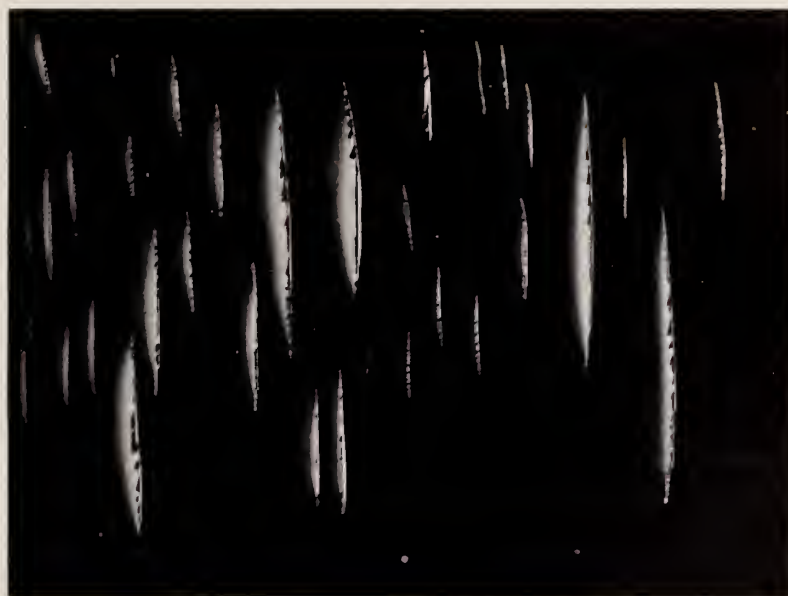
66

67 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*

58/59 CA 4. 1958-59

Aniline on paper mounted on canvas, $36\frac{1}{4} \times 47\frac{3}{8}$ "
(92 x 121 cm.)

Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



OILS (OLII)

68 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*

60 O 45. 1960

Oil on canvas, 59 x 59" (150 x 150 cm.)

Collection Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris CNAC-GP



68

69 *Spatial Conception, In the Piazza S. Marco by Night
with Teresita*

*(Concetto Spaziale, In Piazza S. Marco di Notte
con Teresita)*

61 O 51. 1961

Oil with glass on canvas, 59 x 59" (150 x 150 cm.)

Private Collection

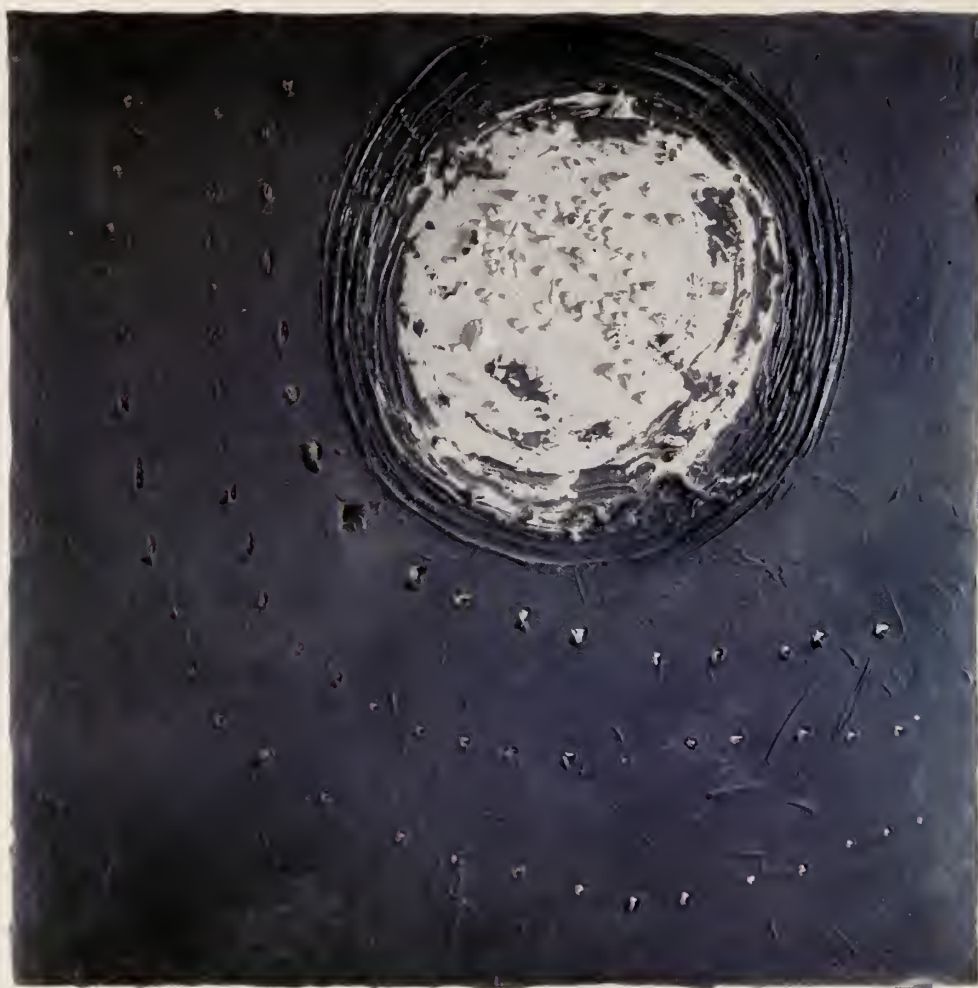


70 *Spatial Conception, Venice Moon (Concetto Spaziale,
Luna a Venezia)*

61 O 57. 1961

Oil with glass and stones on canvas, 59 x 59"
(150 x 150 cm.)

Collection Mario Gori, Milan



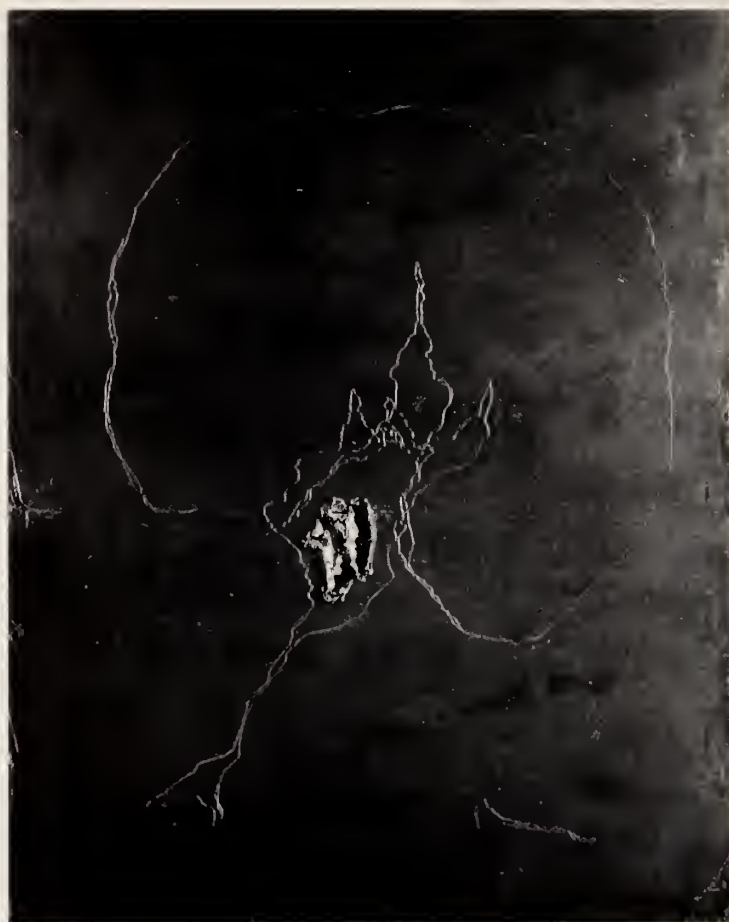
70

- 71 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
62 O 26. 1962
Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (131 x 97 cm.)
Private Collection, Europe



71

- 72 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
62 O 35. 1962
Oil on canvas, 57½ x 44⅞" (146 x 114 cm.)
Collection Francesco Ridolfi



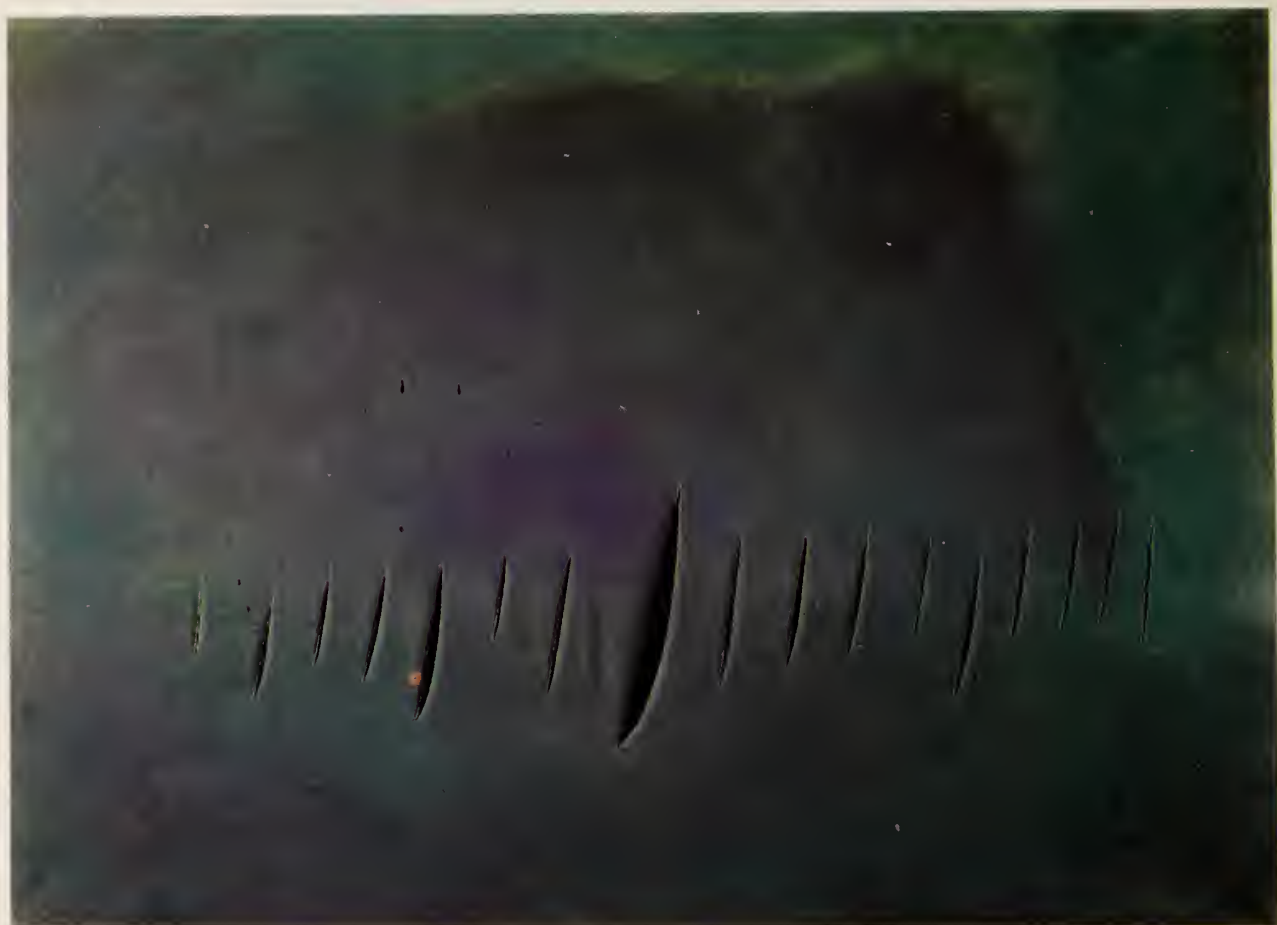
72

- 73 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
62 O 47. 1962
Oil on canvas, $36\frac{1}{4} \times 38\frac{3}{4}$ " (92 x 73 cm.)
Collection Jan and Ingeborg van der Marck,
West Lebanon, New Hampshire



CUTS (TAGLI)

- 74 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
58 T 2. 1958
Aniline on canvas, 38 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 53 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (98 x 135 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



74

- 75 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
58 T 3. 1958
Aniline on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (100 x 130 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



- 76 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
59 T 133. 1959
Water-based paint on canvas, 49 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 98 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
(126 x 250 cm.)
Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York;
Gift, Teresita Fontana, Milan



76

77 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale
Attese)*

61 T 22. 1961

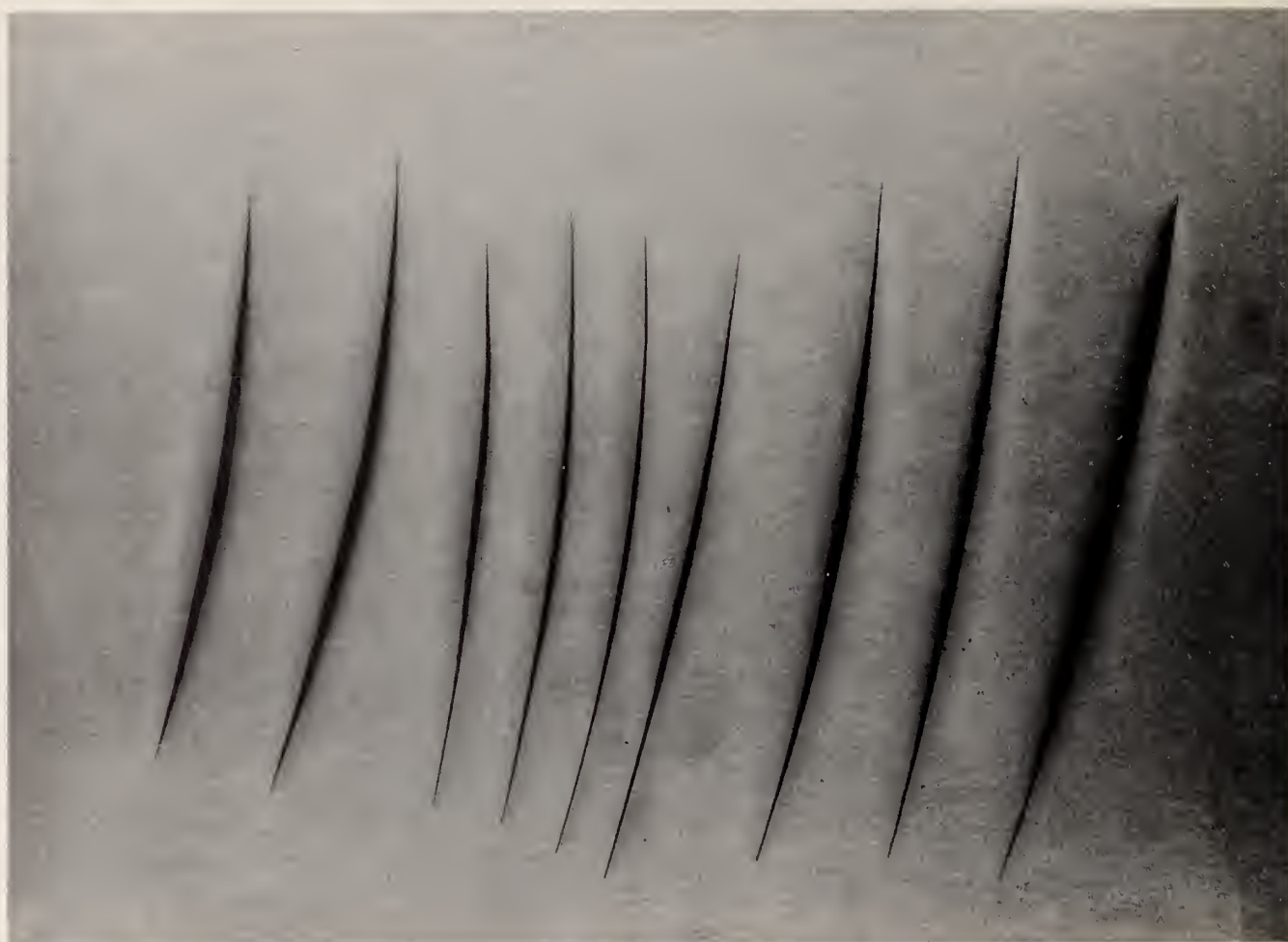
Water-based paint on canvas, $34\frac{5}{8} \times 23\frac{5}{8}$ "
(80.8 x 60 cm.)

Collection Kunstmuseum Bern



77

- 78 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
62 T 7. 1962
Oil on canvas, 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (97 x 130 cm.)
Private Collection, Milan



- 79 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
63 T 4. 1963
Water-based paint on canvas, 21½ x 18" (55 x 46 cm.)
Collection Carlo F. Bilotti, New York



- 80 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
65 T 43. 1965
Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood
frame, $57\frac{1}{8} \times 45\frac{1}{4}$ " (145 x 115 cm.)
Collection Ambassador and Mrs. Piero Vinci, New York



- 81 *Spatial Conception, Expectation (Concetto Spaziale
Attesa)*
65 T 48. 1965
Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood frame,
76 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (195 x 130 cm.)
Collection Kunsthaus Zurich
Not in exhibition

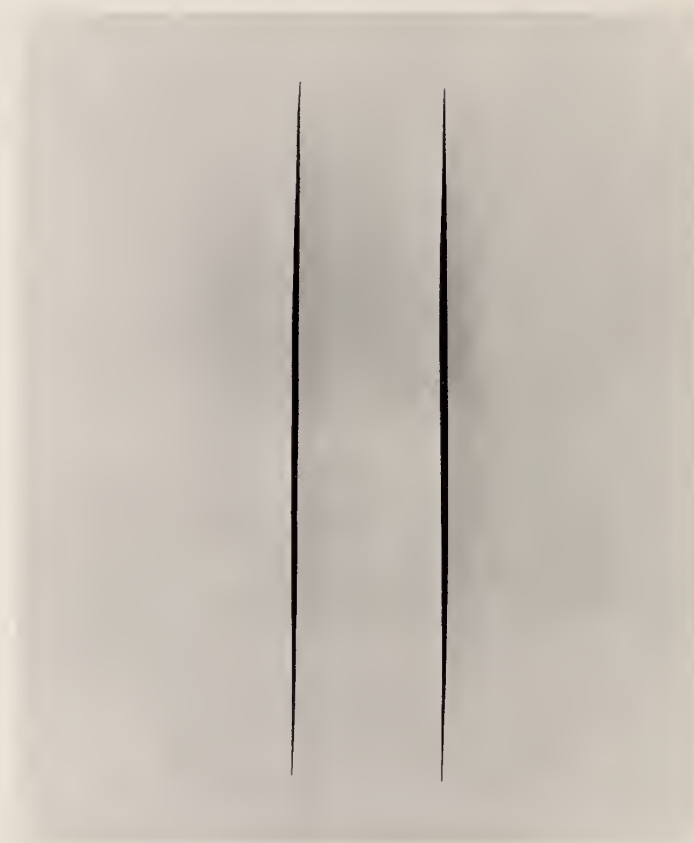


82 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*

65 T 78. 1965

Water-based paint on canvas, 21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 18" (55 x 46 cm.)

Collection Carlo F. Bilotti, New York



82

83 *Spatial Conception, Expectation (Concetto Spaziale, Attesa)*

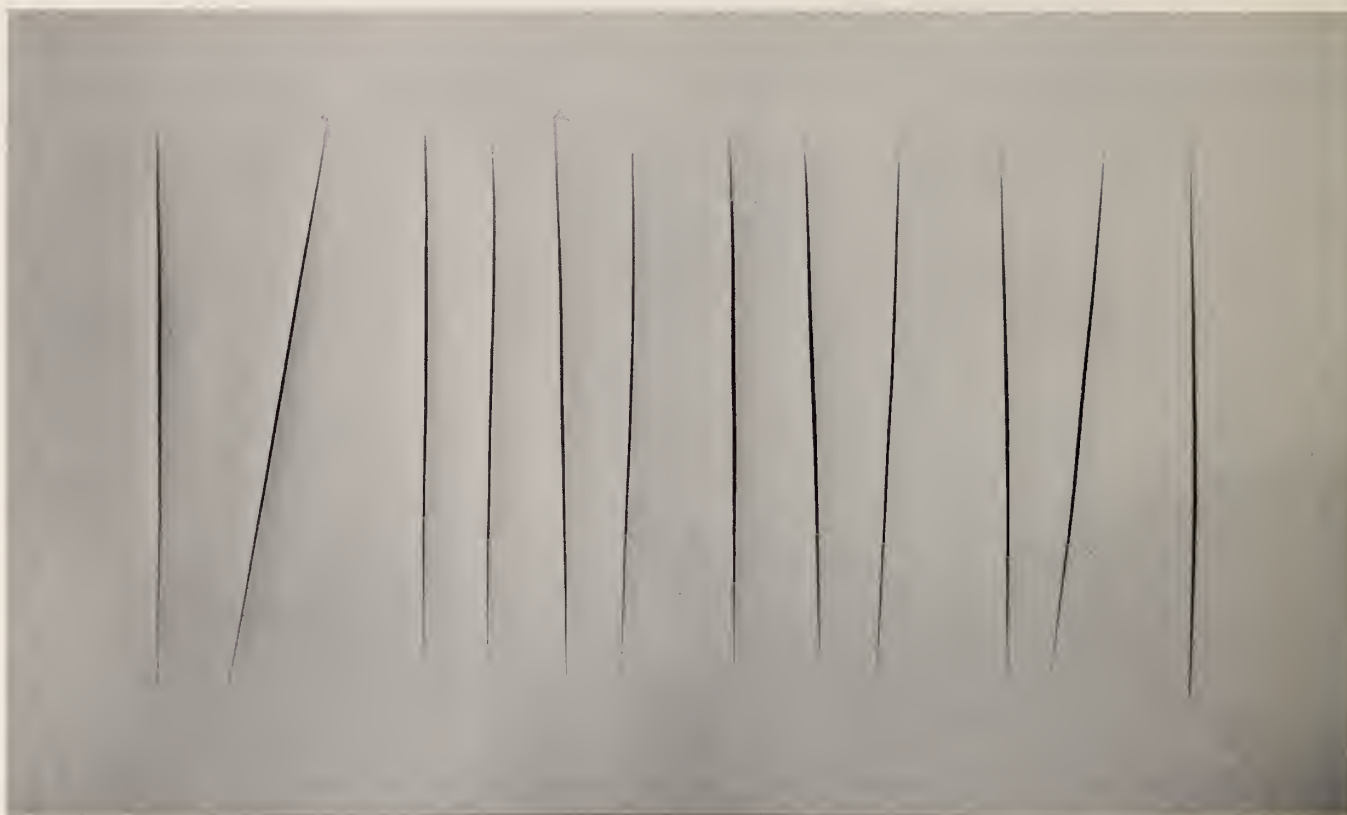
66 T 39. 1966

Water-based paint on canvas, 64½ x 44⅞"
(164 x 114 cm.)

Collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



- 84 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
66 T 71. 1966
Water-based paint on canvas, 45¼ x 74⅞"
(115 x 190 cm.)
Private Collection

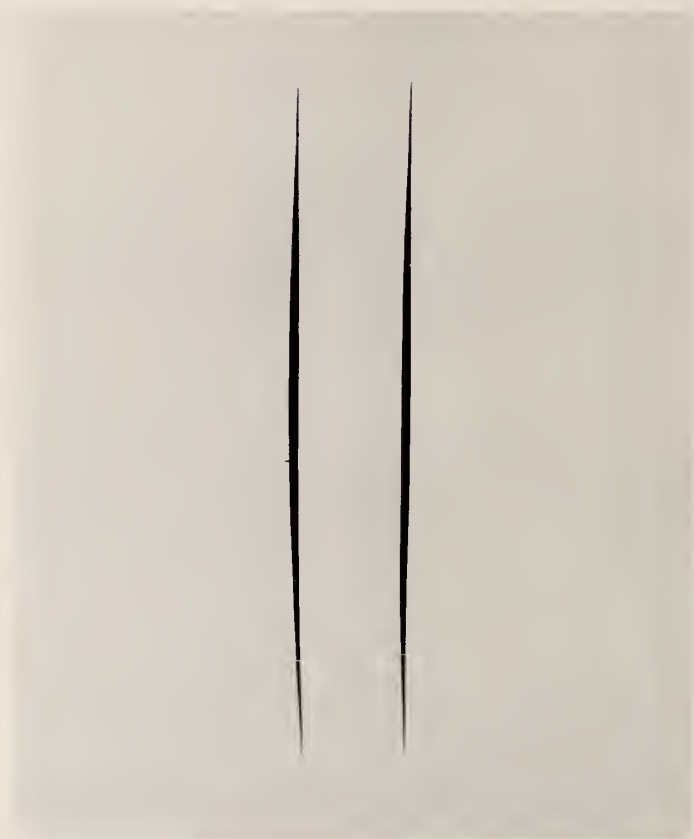


- 85 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
1966
Water-based paint on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 32 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (102 x 83 cm.)
Collection Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark



85

- 86 *Spatial Conception, Expectations (Concetto Spaziale, Attese)*
67 T 47. 1967
Water-based paint on canvas, 21½ x 18" (55 x 46 cm.)
Collection Carlo F. Bilotti, New York



86

- 87 *Spatial Conception, Expectation (Concetto Spaziale, Attesa)*
68 T 105. 1968
Water-based paint on canvas, 21½ x 18" (55 x 46 cm.)
Collection Carlo F. Bilotti, New York



QUANTA

- 88 *Spatial Conception, I Quanta (Concetto Spaziale, I Quanta)*
60 Q r. 1960

Water-based paint on canvas, nine freely arranged elements ranging in size from $20 \times 9\frac{1}{2}''$ (50.8 x 24 cm.) to $24\frac{1}{2} \times 20\frac{1}{8}''$ (62.3 x 51.1 cm.)

Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



NATURE (NATURE)

89 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
59/60 N 18. 1959-60
Bronze, 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ " d. (97 cm.)
Cast no. 1/3
Collection Joseph H. Hirshhorn

90 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
59/60 N 28. 1959-60
Bronze, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ " d. (92 cm.)
Cast no. 1/3
Collection Joseph H. Hirshhorn



91 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
59/60 N 29. 1959-60
Bronze, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ " d. (92 cm.)
Cast no. 1/3
Collection Joseph H. Hirshhorn

92 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
59/60 N 30. 1959-60
Bronze, 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ " d. (102 cm.)
Cast no. 1/3
Collection Joseph H. Hirshhorn

93 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
59/60 N 33. 1959-60
Bronze, 43 $\frac{3}{8}$ " d. (110 cm.)
Cast no. 1/3
Collection Joseph H. Hirshhorn



- 94 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
1959-60
Painted terra-cotta, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ "
(22.2 x 21.5 x 22.2 cm.)
Private Collection



94

METALS (METALLI)

- 95 *Spatial Conception, New York 8 (Concetto Spaziale, New York 8)*
62 ME 5. 1962
Brass, $24\frac{3}{4} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$ " (63 x 63 cm.)
Collection Zaira Mis, Brussels



- 96 *Spatial Conception, New York 25* (*Concetto Spaziale, New York 25*)
62 ME 26. 1962
Brass, 38 x 25 1/4" (96.5 x 64 cm.)
Collection Washington University Gallery of Art,
St. Louis



CERAMIC (CERAMICA)

97 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
1962

Ceramic, 9 x 9 x 11" (22.9 x 22.9 x 8 cm.)

Collection Jan and Ingeborg van der Marck,
West Lebanon, New Hampshire



GOD IS DEAD (FINE DI DIO)

- 98 *Green Oval Conception (Concetto Ovale Verde)*
63 FD 9. 1963
Oil on canvas, 70 x 48 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (178 x 123 cm.)
Collection Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Zero-Raum



98

- 99 *Oval Conception (Concetto Ovale)*
63 FD 20. 1963
Oil on canvas, 70 x 48 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (178 x 123 cm.)
Collection Serge De Bloec, Brussels



99

- 100 *Oval Conception (Concetto Ovale)*
63 FD 27. 1963
Oil with spangles on canvas, 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 48 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (180 x 124 cm.)
Private Collection



100

SMALL THEATERS (TEATRINI)

101 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
64/65 TE 2. 1964-65

Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood frame
42 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 48 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (107.5 x 122.5 cm.)

Lent by Acquavella Galleries, Inc., New York



101

- 102 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
65 TE 10. 1965
Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood
frame, $51\frac{1}{8} \times 50\frac{3}{8}$ " (130 x 128 cm.)
Private Collection



102

- 103 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
65 TE 24. 1965
Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood
frame, 79 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 60 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (202 x 153 cm.)
Collection Teresita Fontana, Milan



103

- 104 *Spatial Conception (Concetto Spaziale)*
 65 TE 39. 1965
 Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood
 frame, 68½ x 68½" (174 x 174 cm.)
 Private Collection



104

- 105 *Spatial Conception, Man in the Cosmos (Concetto Spaziale, L'Uomo nel Cosmo)*
 65 TE 60. 1965
 Water-based paint on canvas with lacquered wood
 frame, 59 x 59" (150 x 150 cm.)
 Collection Gaslini, Milan



105

CHRONOLOGY

1899

Born February 19 in Rosario de Santa Fé, Argentina, to Luigi Fontana, a Milanese sculptor, and Argentinian mother.

1905

Moves to Milan with father; enters elementary school, later is apprenticed to an artist.

1917-18

World War I military service, during which he is wounded.

1922

Returns to Rosario de Santa Fé, where he works as sculptor in father's commercial studio.

1924

Establishes his own studio; intermittently works with father.

1926

First exhibition, group show at Salon Nexus, Rosario de Santa Fé.

1928

To Milan again; enrolls at Accademia di Brera, studies there with Symbolist sculptor Adolfo Wildt.

1930

First one man show, Galleria del Milione, Milan. Two sculptures exhibited at Venice Biennale. *Black Man* (*Uomo Nero*), shown at *Ia Mostra Interregionale*, Florence, marks beginning of his personal sculptural style. Meets Teresita Rasini, his future wife.

1931

In addition to executing numerous terra-cotta reliefs of dematerialized human silhouettes, incises cement tablets in free and abstract manner.

1935

With Fausto Melotti and others joins *Abstraction-Création* group in Paris.

1936

Works as ceramicist at Tullio Mazotti's Tullio d'Albisola ceramic works, Albisola.

1937

Makes series of open-fire ceramics at Sèvres factory, Paris. First one man exhibition in Paris, ceramics show at Galerie Jeanne Bucher-Myrbor. Meets Miró, Tzara, Brancusi in Paris.

1939

Resettles in Argentina at end of year.

1940

Works mainly in Buenos Aires, but also at Rosario de Santa Fé, La Plata, Cordoba, Mar del Plata, Pergamino. From 1940-46 his sculpture is primarily figurative, but expressionist elements appear with increasing frequency.

1946

Establishes Academia d'Altamira art school in Buenos Aires with Jorge Romero Brest. Publication of *Manifiesto Blanco*, conceived by a group of his students and young artists. Although he strongly influenced conception of *Manifiesto*, Fontana did not sign it.

1947

Returns to Italy in April. Settles in Milan, establishes contact with group of young artists. Frequent discussions lead to publication of *Iº Manifiesto Spaziale*, May, signed by Fontana and others.

1948

Signs *IIº Manifiesto Spaziale* with others.

1949

First *Buchi* (Holes), punctured canvases. Designs spatial environment at Galleria del Naviglio, Milan. February 10, symposium on this environment held at a weekly meeting of Germana Marucelli's *Jendi* circle. Participates in *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1950

Increasingly concerned with ideas of space in painting and experiments with *Buchi*, piercing paper and canvas to make spatial screens. *IIIº Manifiesto Spaziale*, signed by Fontana and others, published.

1951

Begins *Pietre* (Stones) series in which he incorporates "stones," which are fragments of Murano glass, into his canvases. Participates in competition for commission for fifth portal of Milan Cathedral. Entries exhibited at IX Milan Triennale, although doors were never executed. Also installs environment of neon tubing in ceiling with indirect lighting at Triennale; presents his *Manifesto Tecnico* there.

1952

Receives first prize ex aequo with Luciano Minguzzi for Milan Cathedral door. *Manifesto del movimento spaziale per la televisione* published.

1954

First *Gessi* (Chalks) with holes, sometimes with collage, on canvas.

1956

Begins *Inchiostri* (Inks) made of aniline, sometimes with collage and/or holes.

1958

First *Tagli* (Cuts), which he calls *Attese* (expectations or hopes). One man exhibition, XXIX Venice Biennale.

1959

First *Quanta*, oval or polygonal canvases used in freely arranged groups. During summer at Albisola begins *Nature* terra-cottas. Participates in *Documenta II*, Kassel; V São Paulo Bienal.

1960-61

Between 1960-61 begins series of *Olii* (Oils). Large-scale oils dedicated to Venice; these shown in 1961 at Arte e Contemplazione, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, then in New York at Martha Jackson Gallery. During visit to New York on occasion of this exhibition conceives cycle devoted to the American metropolis, first as paintings, then after his return to Milan in *Metalli*, incised, cut and perforated sheet metal.

1964-66

Teatrini (Small Theaters) series of pierced canvases with superimposed wooden elements.

1966

Designs spatial environment for retrospective at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Costumes and sets for Petras-si's opera *Ritratto di Don Chisciotte*, La Scala, Milan.

1967

Conceives three space environments: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; exhibition *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine*, Foligno; Galleria del Deposito, Genoa.

1968

Moves to Comabbio where he restores his family house, in which he builds new studio. September 7 dies at Comabbio.

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